

High Country News

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New data released on violent threats to federal employees

Documents show 15 incidents in 2014, but don't account for the Cliven Bundy standoff.

Tay Wiles | June 29, 2015

Last week, while in Nevada for a Western Governors' Association event, Department of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell promised that scofflaw rancher Cliven Bundy will be held accountable for his unlawful actions. Bundy has been allowing his cattle to graze illegally in southern Nevada on and off for decades (<https://www.hcn.org/issues/46.8/the-blm-vs-cliven-bundy-timeline/view>), and land near his ranch was the site of an armed standoff in April 2014 between his states' rights-oriented supporters and federal officials and contractors.

"Cliven Bundy has had multiple court orders to remove his cattle from federal public lands and he has not paid his grazing fees and he has not abided by the law," Jewell told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (<http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/bundy-blm/interior-chief-bundy-will-be-held-accountable>). "We will continue to pursue that."

This statement echoes what she and other officials have said over the past 14 months, though the rancher and most of his supporters who pointed guns at the feds that day have seen no legal repercussions. Earlier this month, six anonymous gunshots were fired (<http://www.sltrib.com/home/2619744-155/shots-fired-near-researchers-on-public>) on public land near the camp of three Bureau of Land Management contract researchers from the Reno-based nonprofit Great Basin Institute who were monitoring water in the Gold Butte area, near the Bundy Ranch. The BLM has said it would take extra precautions in the area as a result.

Environmental groups that are concerned about the impact of grazing say that by allowing ranchers like Bundy to let livestock graze illegally in sensitive habitat encourages others to do the same, to the detriment of ecosystems. At least three green organizations, Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians and Oregon Wild, have now partnered with the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, the Southern Poverty Law Center and others to create the Ballots not Bullets Coalition. The Coalition launched in May, around the time that the conservative militia-type organization Oath Keepers and others, including two Bundy family representatives, gathered in southern Oregon to support gold miners in a dispute with the BLM (<https://www.hcn.org/articles/oath-keepers-show-up-for-another-public-lands-squabble-this-time-for-gold-miners-in-oregon>).

There's a long history of violence (<https://www.hcn.org/issues/46.18/reports-from-the-front-lines>) toward federal public lands officers, as was evident in the results of last year's *High Country News* investigation (<https://www.hcn.org/topics/defuse-the-west>) on the topic. And since 1995, the nonprofit watchdog group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) has compiled annual reports of such cases that involve BLM officials. Last week, they released their 2014 report, which included 15 incidents (http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/blm/6_24_15_Incidents_Breakdown.pdf) involving BLM officers. Despite the Bundy fracas, it was the lowest number since 1996.

The new data include only two incident reports related to the Bundy standoff, including: "Threatening phone call in connection with Gold Butte operation." Reports of the Bundy supporters pointing guns at federal officers during an impoundment of the rancher's cattle did not make the list. Other BLM documents (http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/blm/4_15_15_BLM_Production_44-pages.pdf) that PEER acquired in April indicate that there were many threats during and following the impoundment and standoff. This contradiction raises the question of how many other incidents the BLM has left off this list in previous years.

Last fall, HCN published a map of reported incidents involving BLM and U.S. Forest Service employees, which we've republished below. Click on each point to get a link to the actual incident report. The map now includes PEER's newest data from 2014. Though the new data doesn't include actual incident reports, it does give some details as to the nature of the threat or violence.

Incidents of Violence against Employees of the Bureau of Land Management * 1995-2014	
Year	Violent Incidents against Employees
2014	15 (-25%)
2013	20 (-9.1%)
2012	22 (-4.3%)
2011	23 (+27.8%)
2010	18 (-14%)
2009	21 (+11%)
2008	19 (--)
2007	No data
2006	23 (21%)
2005	29 (+0%)
2004	29 (-26 %)
2003	39 (+8%)
2002	36 (+24%)
2001	29 (+4%)
2000	28 (+33%)
1999	21 (-50%)
1998	42 (+75%)
1997	24 (+85%)
1996	13 (+61%)
1995	8 (--)

Incidents of violence or intimidation reported by the BLM. PEER collected this data through Freedom of Information Act requests.



Map created by  High Country News

Offense Description	Date	Location	State	Actions	Disposition
Verbal Racist Threats While Resisting Arrest	02/06/2014	DOBBA 81 JOHN JOHNSON VALLEY OHV AREA MEANS DRY LAKE	CA SO	Crim. Comp - AUSA	Closed - Arrest
Implied Physical Threat on Officer	02/15/2014	DOEC IDRA SOUTH DUNEBUGGY FLATS	CA SO	Written Warning/FI	Closed - Incident Only
Intimidation Harassment of Police Canine	03/13/2014	GITU TOWN OF MARANA	AZ SO	Crim. Comp - State/Local	Closed - Prosecution Declined
Threatening Phone Call in Connection With Gold Butte Operation	04/05/2014	SHLV MESQUITE GOLD BUTTE CATTLE IMPOUND	NV SO	Written Report Filed	Open - Pending
Intimidation And Frisking of Non-LEO Employee in Connection with Gold Butte Operation	04/18/2014	CCSG RCNCA RED CLIFFS CAMPGROUND	UT SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Incident Only
Squirting Water on BLM LEO	05/07/2014	DDPS SRSJMM WINDY POINT	CA SO	Arrest/Phys Custody	Closed - Arrest
Facebook Threats/Retaliation Against Non-LEO Employees Related To Hiring/Job Search	06/22/2014	CCBI CMA TOPAZ FIRE STATION	CA SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Incident Only
Attempted Vehicular Assault/Intimidation on BLM Camp Host	06/21/2014	IFUS KELLY ISLAND RECREATION SITE	ID SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Incident Only
Physical Intimidation of Employee by Biker Gang Types	05/28/2014	WRWO RED GULCH DINOSAUR TRACKSITE	WY SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Incident Only
Hostility/Intimidation Towards BLM Camp Host	08/16/2014	WMBU LOG GULCH REC AREA	MT SO	Written Report Filed	Open - Federal Prosecution Pending
Burning Man, Physical Assault on LEO by Extremely Drunk/Drugged Person	08/26/2014	WIBR BURN CLOSURE - INSIDE PERIMETER (PLAYA)	NV SO	Federal Violation Notice	Closed - Incident Only
Verbal Threat of Assault Against BLM Non-LEO in Conjunction with Interfering with Lawful Use	08/22/2014	WRLA BUFFALO HEAD	WY SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Collateral Fine
Attempted Assault on BLM LEO With Vehicle	08/19/2014	HWY 287 Near Rawlins Wyoming	WY SO	Written Report Filed	Closed - Transferred To Other Agency
Attempted Murder of BLM LEO (Shot With Pistol)	06/14/2014	Edwards Crossing	CA SO	Arrest/Phys Custody	Open - Federal Prosecution Pending
Assault on 2 BLM LEOs and 1 State/Local LEO	02/14/2014	Red Rocks NCA	NV SO	Suspect Deceased	Closed - Transferred To Other Agency

Information provided by US Department of Interior and BLM to PEER, in response to a FOIA request for incidents that took place in 2014.

If you are a public lands agency federal employee and have been the victim of a threat or assault, you can share that information with HCN [here](https://www.hcn.org/events/west-confrontations/tips) (<https://www.hcn.org/events/west-confrontations/tips>).

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